*42. [The questioner (Shri Dara Singh) was absent. For answer *vide* page...*intra*]

Palace on Wheels from Orissa

*43. MS. PRAMILA BOHIDAR:††
SHRI B.J. PANDA:

Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is proposed to roll out a Palace on Wheels from Orissa;

(b) if so, the status of the project; and

(c) what is the action plan of the Central Government to construct budget hotels at important townships in Orissa to boost tourism in the State?

THE MINISTER OF TOURISM (SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI): (a) to (c) A Statement is laid on the Table of the Sabha.

Statement

(a) and (b) There is no proposal under the consideration of Ministry of Tourism to roll out a Palace on Wheels from Orissa.

(c) The Ministry of Tourism under its Scheme of 'Product/Infrastructure Development for Destinations and Circuits' provides Central Financial Assistance to States/UTs for construction of Budget Accommodation in North-East, Jammu & Kashmir and Eco-Tourism Projects in the whole of the country.

MS. PRAMILA BOHIDAR: Mr. Chairman, Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister in what way Palace on Wheels from Orissa would promote tourism in different parts of the State? What will be the total cost of the project of Palace on Wheels? Has any survey taken place? Has the Government received any proposal from the State Government?

SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI: Under the scheme of luxury trains which are State-specific, I would like to inform the hon. Member that there has been no proposal for such a scheme received from the Orissa Government till date. But, under the large revenue-generating projects, there is a scheme with the Ministry of Tourism to give, at least, a certain amount of money in three instalments for trains which are State-specific for the promotion of tourism as has been done in a few other States. We are looking at issues as to how to promote this in other States as well. But it is difficult to expand further till we resolve the on-going projects.

MS. PRAMILA BOHIDAR: What is the proposed action plan of the Centre to boost tourism in Orissa to improve economy of this backward region?

SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI: Sir, in the Tenth Five Year Plan, we have given large amounts to Orissa for tourism development, both destination and circuits. Funds have been allocated from the Ministry of Tourism annually for the celebrations of fairs and festivals. There is an ongoing effort to promote places of Buddhist interest,

†† The question was actually asked on the floor of the house by Ms. Pramila Bohidar.

especially in the last year, when there was celebration to commemorate 2550 years of Buddha Mahaparinirvana. To develop sites of Buddhist interest, there is a pending request with the Ministry of Finance also to give us some kind of tax incentives for building budget hotels in cities of Buddhist interest for foreign and domestic tourists.

SHRI B.J. PANDA: Sir, the hon. Minister has stated that there is no proposal under consideration of her Ministry to introduce Palace on Wheels train in Orissa. That is technically correct. But, I would like to bring to the Minister's attention a report in the New Indian Express of 18th April of this year which says that the IRCTC, which is a corporation under the Ministry of Railways, has indeed made such a proposal and I quote the report. "If the IRCTC has its way, then, a Palace on Wheels train will shortly be starting from Orissa." Now, it is obvious that the Railway Ministry is not allowing the IRCTC to have its way. I would seek an assurance from the hon. Minister that in the interest of developing tourism in Orissa, about which she has told so much just now, she will take up this issue with the Railway Ministry to allow the IRCTC to implement its plan to have a Palace on Wheels rolling out from Orissa.

SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI: Sir, I am sure that hon. Member will agree that I can't give assurance on behalf of another Ministry.

SHRI B.J. PANDA: I would seek an assurance from the hon. Minister only for taking it up with the Railway Ministry.

SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI: I have already said that we have not received an official proposal. There are some ongoing proposals to have tourism-centric trains for some other States. It will be my constant endeavour to try and replicate the success stories of either Palace on Wheels or Deccan Splendour, or other such tourism trains, Buddhist Circuit trains to other States as well and Orissa certainly has to be one, among other States, to be on priority basis.

श्रीमती विप्लव ठाकुर: माननीय सभापति महोदय, मैं माननीय मंत्री महोदया से कहना चाहती हूं कि उन्होंने प्रश्न के पार्ट 'सी' का जो जवाब दिया है उसमें कहा है कि 'Product infrastructure/development for destination and circuit - budget accommodation' इन्होंने इसका क्या क्राइटेरिया रखा है? इसके अलावा नॉर्थ ईस्ट तथा जम्मू और कश्मीर के संबंध मे कहा है कि वहां पर होटल्स बनाए जाएंगे। हिमाचल प्रदेश, जो टूरिज्म के लिहाज़ से बहुत ज्यादा महत्वपूर्ण है, उसके लिए यह क्यों नहीं रखा गया है–यह मैं मंत्री महोदया से जानना चाहती हूं?

श्रीमती अम्बिका सोनी: सर, हमारी टूरिज्म मिनिस्टरी की एक स्कीम बजट होटल्स के लिए सब्सिडी देने की है। एक, दो और तीन सितारा होटलों के लिए हम तमाम उन लोगों और संस्थाओं को सब्सिडी देते हैं जो बजट होटल बनाना चाहें। अभी तक थ्री–स्टार होटल्स के लिए सब्सिडी 75 लाख तक थी। जहां तक नॉर्थ ईस्ट की आठ स्टेट्स और जम्मू–कश्मीर को यह प्रपोजल देने की बात है, माननीय सदस्या को जरूर इस बात की जानकारी है कि हमारी नीति के अनुसार हमारे बजट का दस परसेंट एक्स्ट्रा प्रोविजन नॉर्थ ईस्टर्न स्टेट्स के लिए किया जाता है। वह तो विशेष प्रोविजन है ही, लेकिन जहां तक हिमाचल प्रदेश की बात है, जो हम हर स्टेट में सब्सिडी देते हैं, वह हिमाचल प्रदेश में भी दी जाती है और आगे भी हम देने का प्रयास जारी रखेंगे।

श्री रुद्रनारायण पाणिः धन्यवाद सभापति महोदय, आप राज्य सभा के तेरहवें सभापति हैं और कल जब आपने हमारा यहां सभापतित्व किया था तो कल 13 तारीख थी और हम भी तेरह वाले हैं। हमारे नेता श्री वाजपेई जी पहले 13 दिन के लिए देश के प्रधान मंत्री रहे और बाद में 13 साल तक रहे।

MR. CHAIRMAN: What is your question? (*Interruptions*)

श्री रुद्रनारायण पाणिः सर, आप भी तेरह वाले हैं।...**(व्यवधान)**

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please put the question? (*Interruptions*)

श्री रुद्रनारायण पाणिः महोदय, मैं अवश्य सवाल पर आऊँगा। महोदय, पिछले बजट सत्र में मैंने एक सवाल किया था।

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please put the question? (*Interruptions*)

श्री रुद्रनारायण पाणिः महोदय, उड़ीसा के कोणार्क में एक सूर्य मंदिर है। हम सब जानते हैं कि भगवान सूर्य सकल शक्ति के स्रोत होते हैं। कोणार्क के सूर्य मंदिर में सूर्य पूजा होती है या नहीं, क्या यह माननीय मंत्री महोदया, मंत्रालय और वर्तमान सरकार को पता है? मेरा सीधा सवाल है कि कोणार्क के सूर्य मंदिर में अब सूर्य पूजा होती है या नही? अगर नहीं होती है तो सूर्य पूजा का प्रबंध करने के लिए सरकार के पास क्या उपाय है और क्या प्रस्ताव है?...**(व्यवधान)** हमें यह भी पता है और आपकी राजनीति भी पता है।...**(व्यवधान)**

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please sit down. (*Interruptions*)

श्री रुद्रनारायण पाणिः हमें पता है, लेकिन केवल पर्दाफाश करने के लिए यह सवाल है।...**(व्यवधान)**

श्रीमती अम्बिका सोनीः सर, इस प्रश्न का बारीकी में उत्तर देने के लिए मुझे समय चाहिए, क्योंकि मान्यवर सदस्य का जो प्रश्न है वह ऑरिजिनल प्रश्न से संबधित नहीं है। मैं पूरी जानकारी हासिल करके मान्यवर सदस्य को दे दूंगी।

श्री कलराज मिश्रः इस मंदिर की मरम्मत करने की भी आवश्यकता है। इस संबंध में भी कुछ अलग से व्यवस्था करें तो ज्यादा उपयुक्त होगा।

MR. CHAIRMAN: Next, Dr. Chandan Mitra.

DR. CHANDAN MITRA: Sir, my question to the hon. Minister concerns the situation where there are circuits which cross between States like the Buddhist Circuit, for instance, which goes from Eastern U.P., Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa, and, if there are proposals to run a train connecting all these Buddhist sites — specifically, I would like to mention the Dhaulagiri site in Orissa near Bhubaneshwar, which is a very famous site where the battle of Kalinga was fought — to which the Minister said there was no proposal from the State Government, then, I would like to know, for an inter-State circuits of this nature, who is the proposing authority to run special trains, and, how can these be implemented, if the Ministry of Tourism does not take initiative in this matter.

SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI: Sir, the Ministry of Tourism is more than willing to take initiatives of this kind but there are financial implications. The three trains for tourists that we have started with the Ministry of Railways have not yet taken off because there are some financial implications not only of the capital investment,

which is needed for getting the train on track, but also of the running cost and issues like who will bear the running cost, who will take care of it in the first few years if the train does not run on profit. Those things are being sorted out. Once the Ministry of Railways, with our help and support, is able to work out the first few trains, which have already been announced, I am confident that we will be able to take up trains, which will have an inter-State impact on connotation. At the moment, there is no train yet, which is running on inter-State basis.

State-run low cost domestic airlines

*44. SHRI MANOHAR JOSHI: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the first State-run low cost domestic airline is all set to take wings very shortly to target truck routes between big cities as also sectors that are not fully covered by full service carriers; and

(b) what would be ticket pricing and whether it would be comparable to those offered by current LCCs (Low Cost Carriers)?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI PRAFUL PATEL): (a) and (b) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) Yes, Sir. Air India Express, the budget carrier launched by Air India's subsidiary company, is planning to commence domestic operations from October, 2007 in addition to its existing international operations.

(b) The fares charged by Air India Express would be competitive and comparable to the other low cost carriers operating on the same routes.

SHRI MANOHAR JOSHI: Mr. Chairman, Sir, the Budget Carrier is to start from coming October. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether this budget carrier will be going to the remote areas, as is expected, and, what is the exact competitive rate, which the Minister proposes for the budget carriers.

SHRI PRAFUL PATEL: Sir, the Air India Express, the budget carrier of the national airline, is already in operation for the last two years or more. It is primarily having operations in the international sectors. Again, it is, primarily, driven from Kerala, Amritsar and from many cities to the Middle East and the South-East Asian countries.After the merger of Air India and Indian Airlines, the budget carrier will now also have a domestic footprint because there is a lot of competition in this segment even within the country, and, as all of us are aware, because of budget carriers now flying in the country, the scope of air travels has widened. Many people are now able to afford air travel. So, it would be equally in the interest of the national carrier to expand its operation to be able to enter that segment in the domestic sector. And, that is the reason why, as we have answered, from October, post merger, this budget carrier will now also operate within India to be able to take on competition and also to enter that segment.

As far as pricing is concerned, I am sure, all of us will agree that on account of deregulation, the Government does not regulate prices of tickets to be charged by the airlines. It has also helped in again widening the entire sector. And, as a result